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RM-4041-ARPA  
APRIL 1964

THE MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS OF  
THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE HIGHLANDS

Gerald C. Hickey

PREPARED FOR:  
ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

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*The* **RAND** *Corporation*  
SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA

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The major ethnic groups of the  
South Vietnamese Highlands

RAND CORPORATION

MEMORANDUM

RM-4041-ARPA

APRIL 1964

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THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE HIGHLANDS

Gerald C. Hickey<sup>444041</sup> 1925-

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PREFACE

This Memorandum brings together a variety of heretofore scattered information on the most significant groups of the southern Vietnamese highlands, to whom the French refer collectively as the montagnards. Although the report also touches on other aspects of highland society, its main focus is on the culture, social and political organization, and religious beliefs and practices of the **six largest groups**. Section I attempts to define their common characteristics, experiences, and customs, and to set down some generalizations about the highland people and their relations with the outside world. Section II contains the more specific information on highland history, a discussion of several unique cultural phenomena, and detailed ethnographic data on the individual groups.

The study is based on both published and unpublished materials, which the author consulted in the United States and in France. Unfortunately, available sources are too few and limited in focus to yield a comprehensive picture of all highland groups. Information on recent developments is particularly scarce, and it should be noted that none of the research for the sources cited in this study was done after 1958, several later publication dates notwithstanding.

The highlands have traditionally been a buffer zone in contests for power in the area. Only a decade ago, highland groups were fighting on both sides of the French-Vietminh war. Today, they are inevitably involved in the insurgency in South Vietnam, as the Communists have made a considerable effort to enlist their loyalty and active co-operation for the Viet Cong cause.

RM-4041-ARPA is being issued in the belief that even a partial survey such as this may be useful to those who are concerned with current problems in South Vietnam.

## SUMMARY

The society of the Indochinese peninsula may be divided roughly into two major segments: the people of the plains, valleys, and deltas, who have been strongly influenced by the civilizations of India and China, and the inhabitants of the highlands (the montagnards, as the French call them), who have remained far more aloof, and about whom even today relatively little is known. To be sure, the highlanders have not been completely isolated. Many groups have long had contact with their lowland neighbors, who in many instances are related linguistically, and, since the mid-nineteenth century, they have had to deal with the French colonial administrators. Essentially, however, the highland people have not become part of the great traditions that have touched them; they have not been "civilized."

The largest and most important of the southern Vietnamese highland groups are the Rhadé, Jarai, Mnong, Stieng, Bahnar, and Sedang. The settlement pattern, social organization, and religious beliefs and practices of each are described in some detail in the second section of this Memorandum. They occupy the greater part of the Darlac plateau and, with the exception of the Bahnar,

extend into either southern Laos or eastern Cambodia. Languages vary, as some belong to the Malayo-Polynesian and others to the Mon-Khmer stock, but contiguous groups, even those of different ethnolinguistic divisions, have little difficulty understanding one another. In addition to a strong physical resemblance, the highland people exhibit a variety of common characteristics and patterns. The most outstanding of these is the fact that their societies are village-centered.

Economically, the highland village is self-sufficient, producing all it needs and consuming all it produces. By the "slash-and-burn" method (swidden agriculture), the highlanders plant dry rice in a part of the forest that they have first cut down, dried out, and burned, using the ashes from the fire as fertilizer. Their diet is supplemented by secondary crops in the swidden and in kitchen gardens, by the raising of chickens, pigs, buffaloes, and goats, and by hunting and fishing.

Politically, too, the village is the most important unit. Although the highland groups are often spoken of as tribes, they have no tribal organization. And, prior to the establishment of the French administration at the end of the nineteenth century, there was no political

superstructure or recognized permanent leadership beyond the village. Individual leaders -- especially some of the Jarai's powerful sorcerers, the Sadets -- have been known to gain powers beyond the boundaries of villages, but any political unions they achieved were invariably short-lived. And such associations as the toring of the Bahnar (large territories claimed collectively by the villages within them) serve only the more efficient protection of hunting, fishing, and farming rights.

The pattern of village life is similar in all highland groups. Political authority is a male prerogative, though, in the matrilineal kinship systems of the Rhadé, the Jarai, and the Mnong, certain important property rights belong to the women. Every village has a council of elders, usually drawn from male household heads, and one of these becomes the village headman, selected either by the council or by the villagers. The headman, assisted by the elders, has charge of village affairs, liaison with the district authorities, the organization of village rituals, and the administration of justice in cases that cannot be resolved by the families concerned and in those involving violations of village customs and taboos. (One variation in this pattern of

village-centered justice occurs among the Rhadé, where the female proprietors of the land exercise certain jural rights within the territory to which they hold title.)

Although it was officially abolished by the French colonial rulers in the areas then firmly under their control, intervillage warfare still occurs today, and feuding is prevalent. As in the past, a system of highly ritualistic "alliances" and "blood oaths" serves to create ties that prevent or end many feuds, though at times these artificial bonds are invoked for the more effective prosecution of war or the carrying out of vendettas.

In most highland areas, the village elite consists of wealthy families, and in some groups these tend to intermarry to perpetuate their social and political role. Sorcerers enjoy high status, exercising great religious, and in some village societies political, influence. The highlander's life is dominated by his belief in a large pantheon of spirits, both good and evil, which rule the fate of man and animals, control the elements, and determine the harvest, and which must be cultivated and placated through elaborate sacrifices and other rituals. The sorcerers' great prestige derives from the fact that they alone are thought able to deal with the spirits

directly and to establish the sources of witchcraft and prescribe the remedy for it. Another primitive belief, which is shared by all highland groups, centers around the concept of ae (mana or soul force), an intrinsic quality of the individual, which may be enhanced by the favor of the spirits. (The greater a person's ae, as manifested by such outward marks of virility as physical strength or a full beard, the greater his prestige and qualification for leadership.)

Historically a buffer zone in the struggles among Siamese, Lao, Vietnamese, and colonial powers, the highlanders have had varying experiences and fortunes in their contact with outsiders. Missionaries and French colonial administrators, for example, have had a considerable influence on some ethnic groups, while others have resisted French control, with instances of active rebellion as recent as 1938. By and large, contact with outsiders has tended to be more disturbing than beneficial. The Indochina War caused dissension among highlanders, as some fought for the French and others with the Viet Minh. Today, in the struggle between the Viet Cong and the government of South Vietnam, they are once again divided.

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I. THE HIGHLANDERS' COMMON BACKGROUND  
AND PATTERN OF LIFE

CULTURAL ORIGINS AND TRAITS

From an ethnolinguistic point of view, the Indochinese peninsula is one of the most complex areas of the world. Generally speaking, however, the ethnic groups that occupy the area can be placed in one of two categories: those that live in the lowlands (the plains, valleys, and deltas) and those that occupy the highlands. More than a geographical distinction, the highland-lowland dichotomy plays an important part in contemporary problems of the area. Historically, the location of a given ethnic group has had significance for its development, for the advances of civilization in the Indochinese peninsula have been restricted to the lowlands.

The primary sources of high culture in the Indochinese peninsula have been India and China. As it spread eastward, the great tradition of India molded the civilizations of the Thai, Lao, and Khmer (the predominant ethnic groups of present-day Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia) as well as of the Cham. (Although only an estimated 40,000 Cham survive today in central Vietnam, this once-populous group at one time dominated the kingdom of Champa, which declined as a

result of wars with the Vietnamese that culminated in its defeat in 1471.) The great tradition of China is represented by the Vietnamese, who were sinocized during a thousand-year period of Chinese rule and who, since the tenth century, have carried this tradition southward in their expansion along the coastal plain to the delta of the Mekong river.

The highland groups of the Indochinese peninsula, on the other hand, have remained relatively aloof from these great currents of history. This is not to say that they have been completely isolated from outside contact or that their societies have remained unchanged. Many groups have long had contact with their civilized lowland neighbors, who in many instances are related linguistically. Sometimes the contact has been marked by conflict, and sometimes it has been largely symbiotic, resulting in a borrowing of culture traits. Also, since the mid-nineteenth century, a number of groups, particularly those in the southern Vietnamese highlands, have had contact with the French. Essentially, however, the highland people have not become part of any of the great traditions that have touched them; they have not been "civilized."

The ethnic groups discussed in this report -- the Rhadé, Jarai, Mnong, Stieng, Bahnar, and Sedang -- are

the largest and consequently the most important groups of the southern Vietnamese highlands.\* They occupy the greater part of the Darlac plateau, the core of the southern portion of the Annamite Cordillera (see frontispiece), and, with the exception of the Bahnar, all the groups extend either into southern Laos or into eastern Cambodia. Described by the French as "Indonesian" in type -- that is, of medium height, relatively husky, dark in color, and without eyefold -- all the groups resemble one another physically. Linguistically, however, there is some variation. The Rhadé and Jarai speak closely related languages that belong to the Malayo-Polynesian stock, which includes Cham; the Mnong, Stieng, Bahnar, and Sedang languages belong to the Mon-Khmer stock, which includes Cambodian. This does not imply formidable linguistic barriers, however, as groups speaking different languages (whether of the same stock or not) but located in contiguous areas are sufficiently familiar with one another's languages to communicate with relative ease.

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\*Highland groups of southern Vietnam are variously referred to as mo'i (Vietnamese for "savage"), người thuong (Vietnamese for "highlanders"), and montagnards (French for "highlanders" or "mountaineers"). Some French anthropologists refer to them as "Proto-Indochinois" (Protoindochinese).

In addition to physical similarity, all these groups share a number of other characteristics. The most outstanding of these is the fact that their societies are village-centered.

### ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Among the highlanders, the village is the most important economic unit. Whatever is needed by the people is produced in the village, and whatever is produced is consumed by its residents. All highland groups practice swidden agriculture.\* That is to say, they select a part of the forest, which they cut and burn after having dried out the timber and brush. Planting then is done with a dibble stick, and with no fertilizer other than the ashes remaining from the fire. Upland or dry rice is the staple crop, but all the groups cultivate numerous secondary crops in the swidden after the harvest and in kitchen gardens within the village.\*\* They also raise chickens, pigs, buffaloes, and goats, and both hunting and fishing are activities essential to the sustenance of the group.

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\*Swidden agriculture often is referred to as "slash-and-burn" or "shifting" agriculture. In both French and Vietnamese literature it is called ray.

\*\*More recently, some groups, notably the Rhadé and Sedang, have begun cultivating coffee plants in small estates, sometimes an individual effort, sometimes a group effort. (7,33)

## SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Politically, too, the village is the most important unit. Although the highland groups often are referred to as tribes, they have no tribal organization. Indeed, prior to the establishment of the French administration at the end of the nineteenth century, there was no political superstructure or recognized permanent leadership beyond the village.\* The present administrative system, similar in structure to the French, provides the only large-scale political organization in the highlands. Among the Bahnar, there are toring, or defined territories, collectively claimed by the villages within them, but these associations are designed to safeguard the villages' hunting, fishing, and farming rights, rather than to provide a political bond.<sup>(17)</sup>

In the past, there have been individual leaders who for a time gained political ascendancy over groups of villages, whole ethnic groups, and in some cases several groups, but the unions they achieved were short-lived. Notable among these leaders were some of the Sadets of

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\*There is some speculation that at one time the Bahnar were under the hegemony of a ruling group of families, but this is not substantiated by historical evidence.

Fire, powerful sorcerers who exercised considerable political influence among the Jarai and neighboring groups. Y Thih, a great Sadet of Fire during the last decades of the nineteenth century, was a recognized political authority and was treated with deference by the French. Another powerful Sadet of Fire, early in the twentieth century, was the one who instigated the slaughter of Odend'hal, a French administrator who had come to pay his respects and then unwittingly affronted the Sadet by refusing to participate in a blood oath. And one of these sporadic political leaders was a European, the Belgian Mayrena, who in 1888 proclaimed himself "Marie I, King of the Sedang" and gained the following of the Sedang and other groups before being deposed by the French.\*<sup>(2)</sup>

Normally, however, the highlanders' political activities are restricted to the village. The village political organizations of the various groups are quite similar, with political authority in the hands of the males. This authority is not diminished by the fact that the Rhadé, Jarai, and Mnong have matrilineal kinship systems, in

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\*See the "Historical Sketch" in Chapter II, below.

which descent is in the female line, and the women own the houses, domestic animals, produce from farming, and gongs and jars (both prestige items) and also hold title to land.<sup>(21)</sup> Every village has a council of elder males, usually drawn from the household heads, and from among these elders the village headman is selected either by the council or by a consensus of adult villagers. Administration of the village, protection of the inhabitants, and organization of village rituals are the traditional responsibilities of the headman, assisted and counseled by the elders. After the arrival of the French, the headman also provided liaison between the villagers and the district authorities.

Justice is largely in the hands of the village headman and the council. Although family problems are supposed to be resolved by the head of the family, other conflicts, including violations of village customs, are dealt with by the village leaders. In the village-centered society of the highlands, customs and moral codes are deeply internalized. Villages have a strong collective spirit, and everyone in them shares in the same style of life and subscribes to the same set of values. Because the village society is small, breaches

of custom do not go unnoticed, and the sanction of the community is brought to bear on offenders. With the exception of the Stieng, who hold the entire family responsible for the wrongs of one of its members, guilt usually is treated as an individual matter, and the guilty party must make his reparations to the community according to custom. The French organized tribunals for most of the larger ethnic groups, using codified native customs and appointing indigenous judges, but these tribunals were only for problems that could not be resolved at the village level. The Vietnamese government at one time planned to abolish them and to replace native with Vietnamese law, but it is not known to the writer whether this has been done.

The one outstanding variation on this pattern of village-centered justice is found among the Rhadé, where a certain jural authority rests with the pô lan, or "proprieters of the land," senior females who hold title to clan land by right of inheritance. As guardians of these territories (any one of which may encompass several villages), the pô lan grant permission to farm within the territory, and, in addition to performing rituals honoring the souls of the clan ancestors who reside in the territory, they are obliged at prescribed times to walk its

boundaries. Should the territory be violated in any way, as by the occurrence of incest within it, it is the pô lan who demands the penalty.(42)

In the past, intervillage warfare has been common among the highlanders. The French abolished it in areas where their control was well established, but it continues to occur among some groups. Other kinds of intervillage conflict, short of war, remain widespread. Institutions such as the aforementioned toring of the Bahnar, or clans among the Rhadé and Jarai which create intervillage kinship ties, serve to diminish wars and conflicts between villages. But among all the groups the favored means for avoiding them are the alliances.\* Through the father-son alliance or the "great xep" blood oath, for example, villages can prevent or end wars and other conflicts and can force bonds of co-operation. By the same token, of course, such alliances can be a means of gaining allies with whom to carry on a war more effectively. And families or clans can ally themselves so as to be able to carry out vendettas. (One such instance occurred among the Mhong Gar as recently as 1949.(6))

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\* See the section on "Alliances" in Chapter II, below.

There is some similarity in the social stratification of highland groups. Most villages have several wealthy families, who constitute a sociopolitical elite. Among some groups, such as the Rhadé and the Mnong, these families tend to intermarry, thereby perpetuating their elite roles. Sorcerers have high status in the highlands, and in some village societies they exercise political as well as religious influence. Although the French administration officially did away with slavery, there continue to be instances of it, particularly among the Stieng, Mnong, and Sedang.

#### RELIGION

The different highland groups share a great many religious beliefs and practices. All have origin myths concerning the beginning of their "race," by which they mean their own ethnic group. Usually, the myth has an ethnocentric touch in that it presents the group's ancestors as the first humans to appear on earth. (A number of the highland groups refer to themselves as "the people.") The pantheon of spirits (called yang by all groups, regardless of language variations) is extremely large; there are spirits associated with the elements, with inanimate objects, with the dead, and with animals

and plants. Though some of the spirits are good, most are malevolent. The Rhadé have a hierarchy of deities, the highest of which is the Lord of Heaven (Aê Diê); the Sedang believe in a pantheon of gods that die as men do.

All the highlanders live in the shadow of the spirits, which are believed to affect human destiny. Illness and misfortune are attributed to the spirits, and only the sorcerer can treat them. The usual method of propitiation is the ritual sacrifice of an animal. First, the victim will sacrifice a chicken, then, if that has no effect, a goat, and finally a buffalo. By such means of curing illness, more than one highlander has depleted his livestock.

The life of the highlander is accompanied by many diverse rituals and governed by a myriad of taboos. The rice-planting cycle includes a system of rites designed to guarantee a good crop, and such things as house construction have their own series of fixed rituals. Families and clans abide by food taboos and obey interdictions against hunting certain animals or consuming certain plants. Villages sometimes are taboo to nonresidents, as are houses on certain occasions. Another concept shared by all highlanders is ae (mana or soul

force), which everyone is thought to have, but in varying degrees. Though the amount of ae that an individual has is intrinsic, it may be enhanced by the favor of the spirits. The degree of ae is manifested in a variety of ways. Unusual physical characteristics such as a powerful physique or a full beard,\* as well as such attributes as an extraordinary ability in hunting or in war, are regarded as signs of much ae. A person so endowed enjoys great prestige among the highlanders, and a manifestly large degree of ae is essential for anyone who aspires to be a leader.

There are sorcerers among all highland groups, and at least one is found in most villages. Because they are believed to be capable of contacting the spirits, their services are much in demand, and in some villages the sorcerers exercise as much influence in village affairs as the headman and council. Their ability to determine the source of witchcraft makes them personages to be feared. In 1949, the vendetta among the Mnong Gar alluded to earlier involved a sorcerer who had informed one family

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\*The Belgian Mayrena, having a full beard and being capable of unusual physical feats, gained the following of the Sedang, who believed him to have much ae (see the "Historical Sketch" in Chapter II, below).

that it was being bewitched by another. Similar incidents in Jarai villages in 1957 prompted the district chief to collect all the sorcerers into one village so as to be able to control their activities.

The Jarai are unique among the highlanders in the greatness and influence of their sorcerers. The Sadet of Fire, the Sadet of Water, and the Sadet of the Wind\* all enjoy considerable prestige for their ability to control their respective elements, but the Sadet of Fire has the added distinction of being guardian of the sacred Prah Khan sabre. From available historical evidence it appears that the traditional guardianship of the Sadet of Fire lends potential political power to this role, but that only certain Sadets of Fire, because of their strong personalities, have actually realized this power and utilized it to gain ascendancy among the Jarai. Deference paid to the Sadets by the French during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century strongly suggests that the Sadets of the period did indeed exercise such power. There is disagreement among French investigators as to

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\*See "The Sadets" in Chapter II, below.

whether the current Sadet of Fire wields any political influence.

#### CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE

The history of the highlands reveals the persistent role of the area as a buffer zone in the struggles among the Khmer, Cham, Siamese, Lao, Vietnamese, and colonial powers, as well as in the recent war between the French and the Viet Minh, and in the current conflict between the Viet Cong and the government of South Vietnam. In the course of these events, the highland groups have had varying fortunes in their contact with these outsiders, and the effect of the experience has differed from group to group. For example, the Rhadé and Jarai have long had contact with the Cham, as all three have close linguistic ties, and when the kingdom of Champa flourished, there was trade with the Khmer kingdom over a route that passed through the Rhadé-Jarai area. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the highland groups have had considerable contact with the French. There were missionaries in the region of Kontum, and French administrators and military were stationed throughout the highlands. The Rhadé accepted French authority more readily than did other highland groups, and French influence is

more manifest in their area in the form of schools, plantations, and a relatively large number of French-speaking Rhadé. The Sedang, Stieng, and Mnong, on the other hand, have resisted French control, and as late as 1938 they revolted against the administration.

By and large, contact with outsiders has been disrupting for the highlanders. The 1935 incident wherein a reincarnation of Set, son of the Thunder Spirit, was said to have appeared and to have caused revolt and confusion\* reveals the agitated and disoriented state of the highlanders in relatively recent times.\*\* The Indochina War brought further dissension among highlanders, as some of them fought for the French and others with the Viet Minh. They are similarly divided in the struggle that is taking place in the area now.

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\*See "Historical Sketch," below.

\*\*Such manifestations of disruption due to outside contact have been found in other areas. For example, there is the classic "ghost dance" of the American plains Indians subsequent to the coming of the white settlers, and more recently the "cargo cult" in Melanesia, following the occupation by American troops during World War II.

## II. HISTORY OF THE AREA AND CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE MAJOR HIGHLAND GROUPS

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

Between the ninth and the twelfth century, the highland area of southern Laos and Vietnam is mentioned several times in accounts of the intermittent struggles between the kingdom of Champa (whose capital city of Vijaya was on the coastal plain of what is now central Vietnam) and the Khmer empire (whose capital was at Angkor, near the Tonle Sap in present-day Cambodia). In those struggles, the area was a buffer zone, which often passed from the control of one side to that of the other. In times of peace, trade between the two kingdoms was carried on over a highland route. Occasionally, highlanders participated in events of the period; in 1149, for example, an army composed of Cham, Vietnamese, and members of several highland groups fought an unsuccessful battle against an army of invading Khmer.(2)

The year 1150 marked the beginning of a long period of Cham hegemony over most of the high plateau (Cham towers in various places in Darlac province are reminders of the Cham presence). This ended in 1471 with the defeat of the Cham by the Vietnamese, who then proceeded to

extend their authority to include some of the areas inland from the coastal plain. The greater part of the high plateau, however, remained ungoverned for several hundred years.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Lao influence in the highlands as far south as the Boloven plateau was increasing, and Khmer control extended over most of the Darlac plateau. Accounts of this period mention the existence of the powerful Jarai sorcerer known as the Sadet of Fire, whom legend claims to be the guardian of the sacred Prah Khan sabre of the ancient Khmer.\* In 1601, the King of Cambodia, the Sadet of Fire, and another Jarai sorcerer, the Sadet of Water, formed an alliance of friendship in which they pledged themselves to exchange gifts every three years. (The exchanges continued until 1890, when Norodom became king of Cambodia.)

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of considerable intergroup warfare in the highlands, and new contenders for control of the area appeared. The Vietnamese, in continuing their southward expansion, reached the delta of the Mekong river, and the Nguyen

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\*See "The Sadets," below.

emperors followed the pattern of extending their control to highland areas adjacent to the coastal plain. The Siamese were expanding eastward and, after struggling with the Lao, assumed control over the Boloven plateau. According to one eighteenth-century account, many of the intergroup wars were concentrated in the Darlac plateau. There, the Jarai were said to be raiding villages of neighboring groups, notably the Bahnar, and carrying off slaves which they sold to the Lao, and the Sedang also were reported as fighting with their neighbors.(2)

The first Westerners reached the highlands in 1843, when Catholic missionaries of the Société de la Mission Etrangère de Paris traveled into the interior from the coastal town of Tourane (now Danang). In 1849 the first mission was established near present-day Kontum, and by 1851 there were four missionaries (three French and one Vietnamese) working in Bahnar villages. Because of the intergroup warfare of the period, the missionaries encountered great difficulties. The existence of the mission was temporarily threatened in 1862, when an epidemic struck down many of the Bahnar, whose sorcerers blamed the disease on the presence of the foreigners. The Sedang aggravated the situation by attacking Bahnar villages at that moment.(2)

When the French occupied the delta of the Mekong river in 1859, agitation spread to the groups in the adjacent southern highlands. (Some sources contend that much of it was stirred up by the Vietnamese.) The Stieng in the vicinity of Thu Dau Mot revolted against the French, as did the Chrau in the area east of Baria (now called Phuoc Le). In the period that followed, the Siamese, French, English, and Germans were bidding for control of the Mekong river, and the southern Laotian and Vietnamese highlands assumed new importance. To secure their claim on the area, the French organized several exploratory missions, the first of which was the Gautier mission of 1881. The aim of the exploration was to reach Hue in central Vietnam from the Mekong delta by following the Donnai river, continuing northward, contacting the Stieng, Mhong, and Bahnar, and ultimately crossing the cordillera to Hue. The mission failed to achieve this end, however, when, upon reaching the confluence of the Donnai and Da Houe rivers, the guides refused to continue northward. In his account of the expedition, Gautier describes the breakdown of traditional culture in some of the small ethnic groups on the southern fringe of the highlands as a result of their contact with the Khmer,

Lao, and Vietnamese. He also mentions a "king of the mois," Tong Hen, a man of seventy-five who trafficked in slaves and was recognized as a leader by some of the smaller groups.(2)

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Nguyen emperors began sponsoring đôn điền, or military colonies, in the upland areas adjacent to the coastal plain, where members of the army were given land so that they might settle these new territories. In addition to forcing many highlanders to move further inland, the Vietnamese settlers exploited those with whom they came in contact. The quan trưởng<sup>?</sup>, or leader of the settlers, often demanded rhinoceros horns or slaves of the local highlanders, and in 1883 several serious incidents prompted restraining action by the French administrators. (In one instance, a highland village headman was burned alive, and his wife slain, when he failed to supply the amount of corvée labor demanded by Vietnamese settlers.(2))

The importance of the Darlac plateau in the bid for control of the Mekong rose with reports, in 1885, that the streams in the Sedang country contained gold and with persistent rumors of other mineral riches in the area. In 1888, the French administration organized an expedition

to investigate the Sedang area and placed it under the leadership of Mayrena, a Belgian adventurer. On his arrival in the Sedang country, Mayrena made contact with Pim, a Sedang chief who had gained the support of many villages among the Sedang and Bahnar. Because of Mayrena's impressive appearance and his unusual physical feats, the Sedang leader concluded that he was a man of great ae (mana) and formed an alliance with him. Encouraged by the French missionaries, Mayrena attempted, through the leadership of Pim, to form a federation of ethnic groups in the area. (Reportedly, it was to be modeled on the federation that Msgr. Brazza had just formed among tribes in the Congo.) The Jarai tried to resist Sedang hegemony, but without success, and, when several of the groups had bowed to Sedang leadership, Mayrena declared the area to be autonomous and named himself its ruler, "Marie I, King of the Sedang." He then sent notice of this new development to the French authorities, and also asked their permission to transport minerals and other produce to coastal towns for shipping. Should the French refuse, he added, he was willing to negotiate with the English, Germans, or Siamese. The affair was short-lived, however. When Mayrena went to Belgium in 1889, the French denied him permission to return to Indochina. (2,11)

In 1890-91, a French exploratory expedition known as the Pavie mission secured the rights of the French in Laos, expelling the Siamese from the highland areas they occupied east of the Mekong river. Accompanied by a band of Cambodians, Captain Cupet, a member of the Pavie mission, traveled from Kratie in Cambodia to the highland towns of Ban Don and Kontum. The group encountered great difficulties, some of which had been provoked by a rumor among the Jarai that Cupet was responsible for suppressing the Cambodian king's gifts to the Sadet of Fire. Cupet, however, succeeded in impressing the Jarai (his compass was of particular interest to them), and they agreed to take him to the Sadet of Fire, who welcomed him cordially. Cupet noted in his account of the visit that the Sadet's followers seemed to pay him little deference. He also met the Sadet of Water and, although he had no gifts to offer the sorcerer, was able to form an alliance with him. (2)

In 1900 there emerged another "king of the mois," Le Vo Tru. (Although the reports are not specific on this point, the name would indicate that he was either a Vietnamese or an acculturated highlander.) With a following of around 900 highlanders, Le Vo Tru raided the central coastal town of Song Cau, killing the French resident, his

wife, and their guards. He and his band then assumed control of the area, until the Garde Indochinoise Provinciale arrived, captured the leader, and thus ended the venture.

During the first years of the twentieth century, there was a marked increase in attacks on French military and missionaries throughout the highlands. In an attempt to restore order and gain the highlanders' support of the French, Odend'hal, a high French administrator, accompanied by a small unarmed band of Vietnamese (Odend'hal explicitly refused an armed escort), journeyed into the Jarai area. There he was welcomed by the Sadet of Fire, and the two men agreed to form an alliance. After they had shared a chicken, the Sadet prepared a special jar containing prescribed ingredients for a blood oath,\* and the Sadet drank from the jar. But Odend'hal refused, saying that he only drank water, apparently unaware of the import of such a refusal. The Sadet became angry and suspicious, and Odend'hal aggravated this by asking to be shown the sacred sabre. Several days later, a band of Jarai warriors slew the Frenchman and his assistants and burned their bodies.(2)

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\* See "Alliances," below.

In 1905, Darlac province was shifted from Laos to Vietnam and a French Resident appointed. This increased French control and, according to Bourotte,<sup>(2)</sup> diminished the power of the Sadets of Fire. Another "king of the mois" appeared during that year. He was Me Sao, of a poor Rhadé family that had known slavery. Me Sao and a small band of followers established themselves in the heights between M'drac and Ban Me Thuot and conducted raids on villages of the area to capture slaves, whom they then sold. The mandarins of Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa were reported to have aided Me Sao in his activities and shared in the profits. As more and more villages fell under his control, Me Sao became bolder, until finally the Resident of Darlac dispatched troops to the area. Me Sao was turned over to the troops by his own followers, and he later died in prison.

The situation in Darlac province improved considerably during the tenure of Sabatier, who was the Resident in the first quarter of the twentieth century. This energetic and intelligent administrator launched public works projects, improved the administrative services, and conducted systematic research on the ethnic groups of the province. Assisted by the able administrator Antomarchi,

Sabatier founded a school system for highlanders as well as a medical service. The growing reputation of Darlac as an area of rich and fertile soil caused a land rush in 1925, and, within a period of a few months, over one hundred bids for land totaling 92,000 hectares were filed with the colonial administration in Saigon. Bidders were either individual planters or representatives of large French corporations interested in establishing extensive tea, coffee, or rubber estates in the area.<sup>(10)</sup>

To meet the demands of this new situation, the French administration undertook a study of the land question in the highlands, and in 1927 Sabatier issued two comprehensive reports, the first concerned largely with the land-tenure question, and the second with recommendations for coping with the problems involved in developing the area.

The first report pointed out that, while some land was unclaimed, there were large areas carefully apportioned by individuals, families, clans, or villages. It emphasized also that land-tenure systems varied from one ethnic group to another. Specific information was given on the land system of the Rhadé, wherein, by the matrilineal rules of succession, rights to a given territory were

vested in pô lan (female proprietors), who held title for their kin group. The limits of the territory were clearly defined, and the pô lan was obliged by tradition to walk its boundaries periodically. She also was responsible for regulating swidden agriculture in the territory and prescribing punishments for offenses committed within its limits.

The second report contained extensive recommendations for land settlement procedure. In essence, land unclaimed (res nullius) would be immediately available for colonization with the approval of the colonial administration, and title to the land could be granted. With land claimed by the highlanders, however, a colonist could only receive a bail emphythéotique, or 99-year lease. In addition to the approval of the colonial administration, the bidder for a given piece of land would also need the approval of the highlander (or group of highlanders) claiming title to the land. For example, in parts of the Rhadé country it would be essential to have the accord of the pô lan and headmen of villages within the territory concerned. To exemplify the legal procedure, the report included model leases. One such lease concerned a M. Maillot of the Paris suburb Neuilly-sur-Seine, who was negotiating

for 25,000 hectares which a French corporation he represented planned to develop with coffee and rubber estates. The agreement with the village headmen and two pô lan was included, and it specified a rental of 97.50\$ per year, of which pô lan Y-Nin was to receive 58.50\$ and pô lan Y-Blum the remaining 39.00\$.<sup>(10)</sup>

In addition, the report covered such topics as labor for the proposed estates. It strongly suggested keeping Vietnamese labor out of the highlands, pointing out that contact with the Vietnamese and Cham had always been deleterious for the highland people. Also included was the proposal to bring in Javanese coolies to work the estates, as the Javanese were of the same racial and linguistic family as the highlanders and employed many of the same tools and techniques. This scheme, however, was never implemented.<sup>(10)</sup>

In addition to formulating the land policy in the highlands, the French extended to the entire area the administrative system established at the end of the nineteenth century for those portions then under their control. The largest administrative units were the provinces, and these were divided into districts, some of which were further divided into cantons. The villages

were the smallest administrative units, and they retained their traditional leadership. Eventually, the whole highland area, designated as the Pays Montagnard du Sud (and usually referred to as the PMS), became a Crown Domaine (Domaine de la Couronne) directly under the control of the emperor.

Although the Rhadé co-operated substantially with the French administrators, other highland groups continued to resist their authority. In 1931, Gatille, chief of Snoul district, was killed by a group of Mnong while inspecting the construction of a new road designed to traverse the southern portion of the highlands. Two years later, Morere, the marshal of the local gendarmerie, was slain in the vicinity of Nui Bara. In 1934, and again in 1935, Camp Rolland, one of the most important military posts in the southern highland area, was attacked by a combined force of Mnong and Stieng.(2)

Between 1935 and 1938 there also was considerable agitation among highland groups further north, in the Pleiku and Kontum areas. Among the Bahnar and Sedang, there is belief in ya -- the incarnations of powerful spirits in human form -- and in 1935 a rumor spread that a ya had appeared in Phu Yen. It was said to be the child

of a man named Ma Wih and a python, and was believed to be the incarnation of Set, bearded son of Kok Glaih, the Spirit of Thunder. Among the Bahnar, Sedang, and Jarai the news caused a great stir; it was interpreted as a sign that the promised "age of gold" had come. Pilgrims began flocking to the house of Ma Wih bearing offerings, for which Ma Wih gave them small bottles of "magic" water as a powerful talisman. The Sedang openly expressed their opposition to the French administration and attacked French outposts. The Jarai abandoned their fields, in the belief that in this new age they would be provided for without having to work. The administration finally stepped in and arrested Ma Wih. Before the tribunal Ma Wih argued that he had committed no crime; he simply had given water to the curiosity-seekers to satisfy them so that they would leave him alone. The trouble, he contended, was caused by the Spirit of the Forest. Ma Wih was released, and the agitation subsided.(2)

The coming of the Japanese on March 9, 1945, ushered in a new period of trouble for the highlanders and of loss of prestige for the French. Some highlanders aided the Japanese, while others fought them. When the French regained control, at the end of 1945, the Viet Minh were

operating in the Darlac plateau and encouraging the highlanders to "fight the colonialist oppressors." In the years following, highlanders fought both on the side of the Viet Minh and on that of the French. With the Geneva Agreements of 1954, most of the southern highlands came under the control of the government of South Vietnam. A large number (the exact figure never was reported) of highlanders who had fought with the Viet Minh went to North Vietnam. With the passing of the southern highlands to the Vietnamese, the PMS as an administrative unit was abolished, and the provincial administrations became directly responsible to the government in Saigon.

Highland agents trained in North Vietnam manifestly began infiltrating the area in 1957, at a time when thousands of Vietnamese refugees from North Vietnam were being resettled in the highlands. By 1960, there were reported to be 51,695 Vietnamese settled on 21,186 hectares of land, most of it in the vicinity of Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku. Since 1960 the highlands have again become a buffer zone, this time in the struggle between the Viet Cong and the government of the Republic of South Vietnam. (1,21)

### THE SADETS

Recent works by French ethnologists agree that there are at present a Sadet of Fire, a Sadet of Water, and a Sadet of the Wind. As already mentioned, early accounts about the highlands tell of a powerful Jarai sorcerer known as the Sadet of Fire. In the seventeenth century, this sorcerer and his confrère, the Sadet of Water (the two are never supposed to meet, for a meeting would bring great calamities), entered into an agreement with the king of Cambodia to exchange gifts every three years. Legend has it that, at some unspecified time long ago, a bond was established between the Sadet of Fire and the Khmer rulers. When a Cham king recovered a glimmering object from beneath the waters of a river, it turned out to be the Prah Khan, a sacred sabre of Khmer royalty. While the Khmer came to possess the scabbard, for which King Jayavarman II (802 to 854 A.D.) is said to have constructed a magnificent relicary, the Jarai obtained the sabre itself, and it was entrusted to a sorcerer of Plei M'tao village, who became known as Master of the Sabre or Sadet of Fire.(2)

According to Jarai tradition, the Sadet of Fire as keeper of the sacred sabre derives his unusual powers from

the host of spirits associated with the sabre, which are believed to live in the Sadet. In addition to giving the Sadet unconquerable strength in battle, these spirits endow him with special power to dispel epidemics through ritual sacrifices. Students of highland ethnology vary somewhat in their accounts of the Sadets and in their views on the influence of these sorcerers on the Jarai and neighboring groups. Jouin<sup>(24)</sup> contends that the last powerful Sadet of Fire was a Jarai named Y Thih, who lived in the village of Plei M'tao during the last half of the nineteenth century, and that his successors are incorrectly referred to as "Masters of the Sabre," whereas they should be called "Guardians of the House of the Sabre" (Ae Buom) because they are not true Sadets. Other scholars maintain that Sadets such as the one responsible for the death of Odend'hal, and also the current Sadet, are true successors to the guardianship and consequently to the title. (12,32)

All ethnologists agree that it is traditional for kinsmen of the Sadet of Fire to slay him when he has grown old, but there are two versions of the method by which the new Sadet is chosen. According to one, the Sadet, prior to his death, throws his copper bracelet into the pool where the residents of Plei M'tao bathe, and whichever

male emerges with the bracelet on his arm will be the new Sadet. Another version is that, after the death of the Sadet, young warriors of the Siu clan (from which the Sadet traditionally is selected) gather to sleep in the same communal house. While they are asleep, one of the elders demands, "Who will be Bok Redau?"\* and, when one of the warriors answers in his sleep "It is I," a cotton bracelet is placed on his wrist as a symbol of his new role. (2,12)

The Sadet of Water, according to all accounts, functions more as a sorcerer than as a leader. He resides in the village of Plei M'tao Ea in Darlac province, where he receives visitors who bring prescribed gifts, and he frequently travels about the area visiting villages to perform rituals that are intended to prevent or dispel epidemics due to droughts. Elderly Rhadé recall that, on several occasions, a Sadet of Water came to the town of Ban Me Thuot, remaining on the outskirts of the settlement as is the custom, and throughout the Jarai areas older villagers recall having seen him. Several recent sources report that there also is a Sadet of the Wind, who, although he plays no political role, has considerable mystical power. (3,32)

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\*Another name for the Sadet of Fire.

Of the three, however, the Sadet of Fire appears to be the only one ever to have wielded political power. Although Captain Cupet on his 1890-91 expedition recorded that the then Sadet's followers paid him little deference, various historical accounts credit other Sadets of Fire with considerable political influence on the Jarai and neighboring groups, and the Odend'hal affair in 1905 would indicate that the Sadet of Fire of that time was a leader to be reckoned with. Recent French ethnologists disagree on the role of the current Sadet of Fire. Father Dournes, a member of the Société de la Mission Etrangère de Paris who has spent a number of years among the Jarai in the Cheo Reo area, believes that the Sadet of Fire continues to have considerable influence; Lafont, writing in 1963,<sup>(32)</sup> denies that the three Sadets enjoy the prominent roles today that they had at the time the French explorers visited the highlands.

#### ALLIANCES

The investigators agree that all highland groups have traditional forms of alliances in addition to marriage (which is considered an alliance between families rather than a romantic liaison between individuals), but none of them has reported on how frequently such alliances take

place. There are culturally prescribed alliances between individuals, between groups (such as clans or villages), between individuals and spirits, and between souls of individuals. From all indications, the ritual forms are very similar throughout the highlands, and alliances between individuals or groups of different ethnic affiliation are not uncommon. The purposes are many: to make war or peace, form friendships, wreak vengeance, gain prestige, form pseudo-kin relationships, or create a bond with a spirit. Some procedures for forming alliances have been described for the Bahnar, and they indicate the pattern for all the groups.

The most common alliance among the highlanders is the friendship alliance (krao po), which creates a bond similar to that between close kin. It is an unalterable relationship, and any subsequent differences between the members must be resolved by the parties themselves. The alliance also includes a pledge of mutual aid, and its obligations extend to the parties' mates and children. But, whereas an alliance such as a marriage creates a close relationship between villages, the friendship alliance does not. Most friendship alliances are between persons of the same sex.(6,30)

As in the initiation of marriage arrangements, the first overtures are made through an intermediary at the behest of the party desiring the alliance. If the other party is receptive, the agreement is marked by a ritual, during which gifts are exchanged. On the day appointed for the alliance ritual itself, the parties meet with the intermediary, and they again exchange gifts -- prescriptively, chickens and jars of rice beer. When both have repeated an oath of alliance in which the spirits (yang) are called upon to bear witness, the alliance is complete. One of the parties then provides a feast, and the intermediary receives as his fee part of the animal slaughtered for the occasion. The other party is expected to present his ally with a gift, which must be, at the very least, an iron ax, at the most, an iron pot.

Because of the obligations involved in such alliances, it is thought best that they take place between individuals of different villages, lest the relationship impose too many demands on one or both parties. Another danger in an alliance is the possibility that a spirit may become involved and create a debt to the spirit (honoh), which brings misfortune unless a special ritual invocation to the spirit is made to satisfy the debt. Honoh is

inevitable in an alliance resulting from a dream, because the spirits are believed to be aware of all dreams and can thus involve themselves in the alliance that they know will take place. The same can happen if a spirit overhears one party addressing another as po, or ally. Honoh usually is manifested by some misfortune. In the event of illness, therefore, the sorcerer takes the possibility of honoh into account and performs a brief ritual to satisfy any possible spirit debt.(30)

Less common than the friendship alliance is the father-son alliance (krao kon ba), so called because it creates a bond analogous to the father-and-son relationship among the highlanders. Usually, it is revealed in a dream, and both parties are obliged to consecrate it by a prescribed ritual. Characteristically, this alliance occurs between one powerful party and one seeking protection, often between two warring villages that are seeking peace. (When peace is the aim, the ritual includes a blood oath [xep], described below.) Arrangements are made through an intermediary, who also sets the date for the ritual. Normally, this takes place in the house of the "son," and the prescribed sacrificial animal is a chicken (or a pig or buffalo for the well-to-do). During the ritual (which

involves a series of symbolic acts), the "son" places a cotton pad on the chest of the "father," and then, from a rice bowl, pours some alcohol on the chest just below the pad while he speaks the oath of alliance. A ritual sacrifice seals the alliance. As the bond is analogous to a filial relationship, there are taboos for the kin of the allies as there would be in case of a marriage.(30)

The blood oath (xep) usually is performed to bring about peace between warring villages, and it also has the function of confirming or strengthening alliances that have been or are being made. On the eve of the ritual, the parties and, where villages and groups are involved, those who would like to be associated with the oath gather for a feast of chicken and rice beer. For the ritual itself, a jar of rice beer is set aside, and, after a chicken and pig have been killed, their blood is collected. He who gives the feast then pricks his finger, letting his blood mix with that of the animals, and to this mixture some rice beer is added. Powdered deer horn, elephant tusk, wild boar tusk, tiger teeth, bark from a special local plant known for its magical powers, and bark from the root of a magical liana also are mixed in, and finally a copper bracelet is added that has first been burnished

in hot coals. Both parties then drink, and those who wish to be part of the oath follow them. Some of the liquid is poured on the head, chest, and back of the participating parties while they utter their oath of alliance.

When villages have been at war, a "great xep" may be organized to confirm the peace. One village makes the overture by offering to sacrifice a pig, and all the inhabitants of both villages are obliged to participate in the alliance.

To refuse a friendship alliance is an act of bad faith. This was illustrated in the Odend'hal affair,\* when the French administrator refused to drink the blood-oath mixture prepared by the Sadet of Fire, whose anger at the insult undoubtedly contributed to Odend'hal's subsequent slaying.(2)

A recent example of a friendship alliance between groups was reported in 1949 by a French ethnologist working among the Mhong Gar. One family claimed that another family was practicing witchcraft on its members and causing them considerable misfortune. Through friendship alliances the accusing family gained a large following

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\*See "Historical Sketch," above.

and sought revenge. The result was that nine of the accused family were slaughtered and eight were sold into slavery. Among the Mnong Gar, friendship alliances also are a means of gaining prestige. They must be made between individuals of equal affluence and are marked by exchanges of buffalo sacrifices.(6)

Another kind of alliance is the krao kon u tuh, or milk alliance, usually concluded when a child's parents are believed to have an excess of ae (mana). This, it is thought, can be deleterious to the child, and the milk alliance therefore provides another set of parents, in spirit rather than in actual status. The mother refrains from nursing the child and finds another woman, with numerous children, to do so in her stead. Presenting the woman with a jar of rice beer, she states, "This child is yours, not mine," and the spirits are called upon to bear witness. Although the child remains with its natural parents, it is given a new name, and the alliance with the new parents is complete.

Illnesses often are attributed to alliances between human souls, usually associated with dreams. Human souls are believed to wander during sleep and to form alliances that are manifested in dreams, and too long an absence by

the soul can cause the body to become ill. For example, if a child cries or has a fever during the night, it is thought that the soul in its wandering has formed an alliance with another child's soul, preferring to tarry with it. The solution is to find a guardian -- an adult -- with whom the child can have an alliance of souls, thus preventing this dangerous wandering. (30)

A number of alliances can be effected with spirits of plants, animals, or the elements. Those with plants or animals create food taboos and hunting taboos, for it is forbidden to consume plants or hunt animals with which one has an alliance. While such an alliance can be formed with any spirit, those favored are the spirits of thunder, water, flames, rice, tigers, elephants, wild goats, palm rats, bamboo rats, pythons, and certain birds. (6,30)

### THE RHADÉ

Rhadé is the name most commonly used for this group. (Some American investigators spell it Raday, (41,43) and some Vietnamese sources refer to the group as E - de. (38)) Subgroupings include the Rhadé Kpa (or "true Rhadé"), Rhadé M'dur, Rhadé A'dham, Rhadé K'tul, Rhadé Epan, Rhadé Blo, Rhadé K'ah, Rhadé K'drao, and Rhadé H'wing. (25,26,28) There is some disagreement as to whether the Bih are a

subgroup of the Rhadé, and most investigators consider them a separate group. The two most recent demographic sources (a North Vietnamese source<sup>(37)</sup><sup>38</sup> and a South Vietnamese government source<sup>(38)</sup><sup>37</sup>) report 120,000 Rhadé.\*

### Settlements

Rhadé villages usually have from ten to twenty longhouses. In addition to being on elevated ground, they are close to a water source. In the southern part of the Rhadé area, between the Donnai and Srepok rivers, the orientation of houses depends on the terrain, while north of these rivers it is invariably north-south. To one side of the house there usually is a kitchen garden, and to the rear are granaries constructed on piling. Every village has a sacred grove of bamboo, which it is taboo to enter.

Constructed on piling, Rhadé longhouses vary in length depending on the number of people in residence. The house is reached by notched logs resting on the side of a large verandah in front of the entrance. The first room is relatively large and serves as a gathering center for the residents, as a place in which to hold household

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\*A 19<sup>42-44</sup><sub>44-45</sub> survey reported 58,473,<sup>(23)</sup> while a 1954 source<sup>(34)</sup> estimated 80,000.

rituals and receive visitors, and as a general work room and storage area for gongs, jars, weapons, and tools. The remainder of the house is divided into compartments, one for each nuclear family,\* and these are connected by a long corridor that extends the length of the house. Every nuclear family has its own hearth for preparing meals. (21,35,36)

### Sociopolitical Organization

The Rhadé are described as having some class orientation; the classic Rhadé poem, "The Song of Dam Son" (translated into French and Vietnamese), reflects a pattern of intermarriage among chiefs' families. (4) Theirs is also a village-centered society. Prior to the arrival of the French, Rhadé villages were autonomous, and each elected its own chief, a man of bravery and other outstanding qualities. Under the French, provinces and districts were organized, and village chiefs were named by the French administration. While higher positions were held by Frenchmen, trained Rhadé were appointed to some of the lower-echelon positions, and eventually there were even Rhadé district chiefs. (42)

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\*A nuclear family consists of parents and their unmarried children.

Rhadé law demands strict obedience to the village chief, and there are specific fines and punishments for any breach. From time to time, for reasons such as the need to preserve the well-being of the village in times of illness or disease, the headman may declare the village taboo to outsiders, and any violation will meet with punishment. (27)

Important to consider in the Rhadé sociopolitical organization is the role of women. Under the matrilineal kinship system, children take their mother's clan name, and women own the longhouses, harvests, domestic animals, gongs, and jars (these last two being great prestige items). The girl asks the boy's hand in marriage, for which she pays a dowry, and after marriage the couple resides in the bride's longhouse. The household head of the longhouse, however, is a man, usually the husband of one of the elder women, and his successor is selected by the residents. The Rhadé territory is divided into sections that belong to subclans (i.e., parts of the approximately twenty Rhadé clans), and the eldest female of the senior line is designated pô lan, or proprietor of the land, to which she holds title. With the title go certain prerogatives and responsibilities. For example,

every seven years she must walk the boundaries of the land, and there are certain rituals that she must perform. When incest or some other grave violation of the land has occurred, it is the pô lan who prescribes the punishment for the guilty parties. And anyone wishing to practice swidden agriculture in the territory must have her permission.(21)

### Religion

The yang, or spirits, that make up the Rhadé pantheon are numerous, and some are ranked. The most powerful of the spirits is Aê Diê (Lord of Heaven). His sister, Dung Dai, is the spirit that protects the paddy, and her husband, Aê Du, serves as assistant to Aê Diê. Two spirits usually represented in human form are Mtao Kla and his wife H'Bea Kly, both lower in rank than Aê Du and both associated with cereals and other edible plants. Among low-echelon spirits are Ae Mghan, protector of paddy and millet, and Yang Lie and his assistant Mjoa, both associated with thunder. Yang Hroe is the Sun Spirit, Yang Mlan is the Moon Spirit, and Ae Yut is the Rain Spirit. In addition to the yang there is a category of errant spirits, known as ksok, capable of great evil. They are believed to inhabit such dark places as caverns and recesses in the

forest and, particularly, the mountains. The Rhadé also venerate spirits of the dead. (25,29,31,34)

### THE JARAI

The Jarai (often spelled Djarai by French investigators) have a number of subgroupings, including the Arap, Habau, Hodrung, Sesan, Chu Ty, Plei Kly, and Cheo Reo. (32) A 1960 South Vietnamese government source (37) reports 137,549 Jarai.\*

### Settlements

Jarai villages closely resemble the Rhadé villages. They are located near a good water supply and on high ground, and will have between twenty and sixty longhouses oriented north-south. Kitchen gardens next to the houses are enclosed, and granaries are clustered on the edge of the settlement. Jarai houses, like Rhadé houses, are constructed on piling, with an extended platform at the end where the entrance is located. The interior is divided into compartments, most of which are occupied by matrilineally-linked nuclear families. There is a common room for gathering and receiving guests. (21,32)

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\* A North Vietnamese government source<sup>38</sup> (31) reports 160,000 Jarai, and an American missionary source<sup>(40)</sup> estimates around 200,000.

### Sociopolitical Organization

The Jarai esteem the Sadets as powerful sorcerers, and available evidence shows that in the past certain Sadets of Fire have assumed roles of leadership. Yet there is nothing to indicate the existence of any traditional tribal organization or political superstructure. Historically, the villages appear to have been, as they are today, the Jarai's most important political units. The adult population selects a headman from among the household heads, and the elderly males form a council that functions as an advisory body to the headman and serves also as a tribunal for resolving disputes. Since wealth is a manifestation of the spirits' approval, well-to-do villagers have considerable influence in village affairs. Bachelors and spinsters enjoy very low status in the sociopolitical structure of village society.(7,32)

### Religion

The religious beliefs of the Jarai resemble those of the Rhadé, with a pantheon of spirits in which some spirits outrank others. However, while their sorcerers have much the same functions, some Jarai sorcerers, such as the Sadet of Fire and the Sadet of Water, have attained a more important place and influence in the community than

have any of their Rhadé confrères.(2) In 1957, Jarai sorcerers in the vicinity of Cheo Reo were disrupting village societies to such an extent that the district chief had to group all of them in one village to be able to supervise their activities.(7,21)

#### THE BAHNAR

The Bahnar occupy an area of approximately 400 square kilometers extending from the vicinity of Kontum in the west to Ankhe in the east. They are divided into a number of subgroupings. Of these, the Bahnar Alakong and Bahnar Tolo live north and south of Ankhe, respectively, the Bahnar Bonom east of Ankhe, and the Bahnar Golar in the area north of Pleiku. Four groups, known collectively as the Bahnar To Sung, are found in the region east of Pleiku, while the Bahnar Jo Long are northeast of Kontum and the Bahnar Kontum occupy the area immediately surrounding Kontum. Smaller subgroupings are the Bahnar Ho Drong in and around Dakdoa, some 30 kilometers southeast of Kontum, the Bahnar Krem north of Ankhe, and the Bahnar Kon Ko De in the immediate vicinity of Ankhe. There is some conflict among investigators as to whether the Hroy and the Rengao are part of the Bahnar. Living on the edge of the Bahnar area, they are mixed with

neighboring groups, and the consensus is that they should be considered distinct from the Bahnar. (7,9,20,44) In 1952, the Bahnar population was estimated at 80,000. (14)\*

### Settlements

The typical Bahnar house measures 10-15 by 3-4 meters and is constructed on piling. All the houses must have an east-west orientation. Normally, the interior is divided into three rooms: the east room for parents and infants, the center room for girls, and the west room for boys and domestics. The center room also serves as a reception room. At times, the ladder to the entrance is removed to signify that visitors are not allowed. (17)

Every Bahnar village has a communal, or bachelors' house, a large, well-built structure on high pilings, easily identified by its unusually high, sweeping roof. (39)

### Sociopolitical Organization

The village is the most important political unit among the Bahnar. Each is governed by a group of elders, who are selected from among the oldest males in the village

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\*In 1941, Guilleminet reported the Bahnar population to be 70,000 (20); in 1949 he estimated it at 110,000. (16)

and who, in turn, select the kra or headman. The kra functions as liaison between the district authorities and the villagers. Normally, this role remains in one family and, with the consent of the elders and villagers, is passed from the incumbent to his eldest son or to another younger kinsman. Beyond the village, the larger traditional unit is the toring, which comprises several villages and appears to function largely for the administration of fishing and hunting rights (and probably also swidden rights). Those within the toring share these rights, and tomoi (non-toring) people are viewed as outsiders, whether they are Bahnar or not. There are indications that prior to 1850 the Bahnar were under the hegemony of one or more ruling families, and that they became scattered as dissension among rival families grew. In the organization of cantons, districts, and provinces in the French period, Bahnar functionaries were drawn from the traditional ruling families of the toring, although the Bahnar continued to draw a sharp distinction between their traditional chiefs and those functionaries who emerged under French rule. Usually the Resident (chief of the province) was French, but lesser positions up to canton and even district chief could be held by Bahnar. (14,16,21)

### Social Stratification

Traditionally, Bahnar society has been divided into four classes: (1) the freemen, who include most of the Bahnar, ranked according to age and wealth; (2) dik, or debtors; (3) tomoi, or outsiders (in this usage meaning non-Bahnar), who have no rights and, being considered sources of pollution, are excluded from certain places such as the stream; and (4) war prisoners, who are slaves. (17)

### Religion

The Bahnar separate events of the natural order -- seasons, births, planting cycles -- from unexpected events such as sickness, death of the young, accidents, and drought. The latter are attributed to the yang, or spirits. One may form an alliance with a spirit and thereby secure its protection. Such an alliance is an individual contract, but it extends to the members of one's immediate family and may be passed on for four generations. Distinction is made between ghosts and spirits, and rituals honoring spirits command stricter adherence to form than those honoring ghosts. In the latter, substitutions may be made for the prescribed offerings (for example, water in the place of alcohol, or an egg for the

sacrificial animal), which would be a serious breach of form in rituals honoring spirits.

Among the Bahnar, the bo jao is described as a magician who receives his power through initiation by another bo jao and whose role is not hereditary, as it is among most highland groups. He who becomes a bo jao must have a special relationship with a female spirit known as a ya nom. The word ya denotes a person possessed of some outstanding characteristic that marks him as an incarnate spirit with special powers. Examples cited include a Vietnamese idiot who lived in the Bahnar area, and an army deserter. Bahnar magicians known as mlai are thought to have the power to consume a victim's liver, thereby causing his death. Greatly feared by the Bahnar are the tiger-men, who are believed to be half-animal, half-human creatures. (15,18,19,20)

#### THE MNONG

Mnong subgroupings include the Mnong Gar (who refer to themselves as the Phii-Bree, or Men of the Forest), Mnong Cil (sometimes spelled Kil), Mnong Rlam, Mnong Prong, Mnong Kuen, Mnong Dlie Rue, Mnong Preh, Mnong Bunor,

Mnong Kpreng, Mnong Budong, Biet, and the Nong.(5,6) A 1960 South Vietnamese government source(37) reports a total of 15,876 Mnong.\*

### Settlements

Since the topography of the Mnong area varies, the size and form of settlements also differ somewhat. Some Nong villages, for example, consist of three longhouses arranged in a triangle; Mnong Rlam villages resemble Rhadé villages, with a collection of longhouses facing a central path and sufficient space between for gardens and pig sties. One Mnong Gar village has nine longhouses arranged haphazardly, with a population of 146 divided among them. Communication between villages is by footpath in most instances, and the Mnong construct log and suspension bridges over streams and ravines.(6,22)

The Mnong houses themselves also vary somewhat from one subgroup to another. Mnong Gar houses are long but not constructed on piling, whereas the Mnong Rlam houses are constructed on piling and closely resemble Rhadé houses. Some Mnong have entrances on the side while

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\*In 1949, a French investigator estimated the Mnong population at 16,496(25); a 1959 North Vietnamese source reported 40,000.(38)

others have them at one end, and roof styles also differ. Interiors tend to be more uniform, with a large multi-purpose room (for rituals, gatherings, and receiving visitors) and numerous compartments for nuclear families along a corridor that runs the length of the house. The Mnong also construct a variety of temporary shelters by their fields or in the forest, which they use when they are hunting. (6,22)

#### Sociopolitical Organization

The village is the most important political unit. A group of elders known as "the sacred men in the forest and the village" are responsible for the distribution of cultivable plots in the swiddens and for the supervision of land ownership in general. They also officiate at the principal rituals, particularly those honoring the Spirit of Rice. Wealth distinctions are important and are based on the number of buffaloes a man sacrifices. Slavery as well as intervillage warfare occur among the Mnong, the latter usually the result of unpaid debts or accusations of witchcraft between residents of different villages. (5,6,22)

### Religion

The Mnong have a large pantheon of spirits similar to that of other highland groups. Spirits are associated with topographical features, inanimate objects, and the ancestors. There are spirits of the paddy, the soil, water, fire, forest, stones, particular sites, paths, the moon, and the sun, as well as powerful spirits of heroes, and certain deities associated with bears, dragons, tigers, and mythical birds. Each family has its own magic plants, for which there are rituals during the planting cycle. In Mnong Gar society the sorcerers (called caak) are described as playing a very important role and are believed capable of causing illness and other misfortunes. There also are shamans (njau) who function as medicine men, effecting cures and officiating at certain rituals.(5,6,25)

### THE STIENG

According to a 1960 South Vietnamese government source,(37) there are 17,162 Stieng.\* Their only sub-groupings described in the literature are the Budip and Bulach.(13) No information is available on the patterns and physical characteristics of their settlements.

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\*A 1951 source put the figure at 60,000; a North Vietnamese source reported 20,000 in 1959.(38)

### Sociopolitical Organization

The Stieng never had any tribal organization, and they have therefore lacked a central ruling authority. Politically, the Stieng village consists of a collection of households, many of them related, with common economic interests that bind them together. Often, an entire household will leave either to join another village or to establish a new village. The household is responsible for the wrongs committed by individual members and for doling out the punishment due any such offenders.<sup>(13)</sup>

Every village has a headman selected by the household heads. Tribunals for wrongs of varying degrees are organized in the village. Crimes of the first degree, entailing punishments above the value of two buffaloes, are dealt with by a tribunal composed of the village headman and two elderly men versed in traditional customs. When the contesting parties are from different villages, both headmen must sit on the tribunal, and no kinsmen are permitted to attend. Where partiality can be proved, the decision of the tribunal is canceled and a new tribunal is formed to rehear the case. Crimes that entail punishments of less than the value of two buffaloes are dealt with by a tribunal composed of two household heads or other males known to be of good character.

Slavery continues to exist among the Stieng. Often it constitutes a form of adoption by which to perpetuate the line in the absence of offspring; in many other instances, the slave is like a domestic who is treated as though he were a member of the family. War captives are sold into slavery, and there is also slavery by capture (particularly when a family refuses to honor a debt) and slavery by sale (usually of orphaned children). In addition, the Stieng have bond servants, who work for a given period to pay off a debt.(13)

### Religion

The Stieng pantheon of spirits is large and complex, and resembles the collection of yang found among other highland groups. Witchcraft is greatly feared. Witches (cak) are believed to kill by eating their victim's liver, and any suspicion of witchcraft prompts an exhaustive search for the guilty party, lest he cause further troubles. A kinsman of the victim and village leaders, after praying in the forest, pass from house to house with a stick to which a weight has been tied and attempt to seek out the witch by divination. When the stick bends before a house, they repeat the process before each member of the household. If the cak is a

male, he is executed immediately, and his children are sold into slavery. A person who, by violating a taboo, has brought the wrath of the spirits on the village is called lah cang rai. He must make an expiatory sacrifice or suffer severe punishment. (13)

The Stieng observe certain rituals of particular importance, one of which is held in each village every five years and is designed to honor the most powerful spirits in the area. The cost is great -- it includes the sacrifice of sixty buffaloes -- and can plunge poor villages into debt. Villagers from the adjoining area are invited to attend.

Numerous taboos surround the entrance into a village. Thus, a village is taboo to nonresidents for seven days after its construction. Similarly, it is forbidden to bring jars of alcohol and specific kinds of food into a house for seven days after its construction, and food must be cooked under, rather than inside, the house during this period. (13)

#### THE SEDANG

The Sedang were so named by the French. They refer to themselves as the Ha(rh)ndea(ng),\* and there are

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\*Devereux's transcription.

numerous subgroupings, including the Danja, To-drah ("those who live in the sparse forest"), the Kmrang ("those who live in the dense forest"), the Duong, and the Cor (also known as Ta Cor). Although some investigators consider the Rengao, Hre, and Halang subgroupings of the Sedang, the majority regard them as separate ethnic groups.<sup>(9)</sup> A 1960 South Vietnamese government source<sup>(37)</sup> reports 57,376 Sedang.\*

#### Settlements

Sedang villages vary in size from ten to thirty longhouses. In the center of the village there is a communal or bachelors' house, larger than the other structures and distinguishable by its high, sloping roof. The bachelors' house is a focal center where rituals are held. In the past, when intervillage warfare was common, it served as the defense headquarters, a central gathering place from which the defenders could easily move as needed. As additional defense in those troubled times, bamboo lancets were placed in earthworks surrounding the village. Apart from the bachelors' house, every Sedang village has a "spirit house" for visiting spirits.

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\*A 1959 North Vietnamese government source<sup>(38)</sup> gives a figure of 80,000.

Houses are normally constructed on piling. Their interior is divided into compartments for the several nuclear families, and contains a common room, with open hearth for preparing meals, which also serves to receive visitors. The house is divided into the "upper" and the "lower" house. Rice is held sacred, as is the upper house where it is cooked before being carried to the lower section.(8)

#### Sociopolitical Organization

The village is the most important social and political unit of the Sedang. Communal or village spirit is strong: when a family sacrifices a buffalo, it must be shared with other villagers; and, by the same token, the evil effects of a person's acts also are shared by his fellow-villagers. Penalties for wrongdoing are a matter for the village rather than the family; for example, two people discovered having incestuous relations must pay a fine to the village, as it is the whole community that will experience the wrath of the spirits. If an individual refuses to pay the prescribed fine, he can be expelled from the village.

Membership in the community includes all those who drink from the same water source. (Strangers are not

allowed to use the village water.) The Kan Pley is the village headman, chosen by adult villagers. He represents the village in annual rituals and is its leader in war. Village society comprises Kan Hngii and Tyin (household chiefs and chieftainesses), Petyao (male and female shamans), iron workers, and slaves; the villagers themselves would include also the animals and spirits.(8,9)

Intervillage alliances are based on trade or war agreements. In the past, it was not uncommon for villages to band together to make war on other Sedang villages or on villages of neighboring ethnic groups. In their difficulties with the French during the pacification period of the 1930's, many Sedang villages allied themselves against the French, and they also attacked Sedang villages that aided the French.

Women play an important role in Sedang society. Every household has its male chief, whose wife (tyin) is the ritual head of the household. Believed to have a "rice-soul" which mystically guarantees good crops, she performs rituals associated with agriculture and distributes the rice in the household. When the harvest is bad, however, she must be replaced by another woman. Only the wife (or wives) and eldest daughter of the

household chief can live in the upper part of the house, so that only they can cook the rice, which is then brought to those occupying the lower part.(8)

### Religion

The Sedang share with other highland groups a belief in numerous spirits associated with inanimate objects and the elements. They also believe, however, that in ancient times the gods (not animistic spirits) and men were equal, and that the gods, as they became more powerful, began to exact tribute from men by intimidation. Gods are thought to be mortal and, after a series of reincarnations, are believed to become the same sort of ghosts as men do after death. They are invited to rituals, but, when their presence is no longer desired, they are driven off by acts designed to annoy them.(8)

The most powerful of the Sedang supernatural beings are Grandfather and Grandmother Knda, the creators of the world. Thunder gods (tara) also are powerful but at the same time harsh and demanding. In war, there are thunder gods on one's own side and thunder gods on the side of the enemy. A-pia are supernatural beings related to the thunder gods, which bear the same relation to animals as do thunder gods to humans. For example, an animal that

has fallen into a trap is believed to have misbehaved and to have been delivered to humans by a-pia in punishment.

The Sedang also believe in numerous ghosts -- good and evil -- of dead humans and animals as well as of dead gods. One evil ghost is said to eat its own liver; another has swords for arms. The souls of ancestors are considered particularly powerful, and they set rules of behavior for their descendants.

The Sedang notion of human souls is complex. Six days after death, the mahua, or vital soul, leaves the human body. In war, the soul of a captive belongs to the spirit that aided in the capture.

The Sedang are reported to have practiced cannibalism and human sacrifice until recent times.<sup>(8)</sup>

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